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## MANAGING COMMON PROPERTIES IN CAMEROON'S INTERNATIONAL COASTAL AREA: PATTERNS OF COEXISTENCE BETWEEN LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND THE BENINESE AND NIGERIAN FISHERMEN

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**ABSTRACT** Coastal resources fulfill important economic and cultural functions for populations. This article focuses on the ecological challenges related to the exploitation of fishery resources by fishermen of Cameroon, Benin and Nigeria in the southern coastal region of Cameroon. In such an international socio-cultural microcosm where community actors from those three countries coexist, the strong anthropogenic pressure on ecological resources generates many challenges, notably compliance with regulations and conflicts in fish and fauna exploitation. At the same time, collaboration in the context of natural resources exploitation allows an exchange of experience and expertise. There also are demographic pressure, low-scale urbanization, unemployment, pollution, and loss of natural resources within communities. This article examines the interactions between different stakeholders involved in resource exploitation as well as the collaboration and the conflicting situations arising in this context. It also traces the different rules of laws governing access to forest, wildlife and fisheries resources in Cameroon.

**Key Words:** Coexistence; Common property; Conflict and resolution; Fishermen; Cameroon.

### INTRODUCTION

Environmental issues have been a major global concern over the last three decades, judging only by the number of international fora (e.g., Rio, Kyoto and Paris-Cop 21) devoted to them. In line with the international treaties signed, Cameroon has undertaken to give priority to the fights against drought and desertification in the Sudano-Sahelian zone, the degradation of dense wet forest, and the destruction of coastal and marine ecosystems, among other issues. In the coastal region of South Cameroon, the survival stakes of a growing population has led to a continuous depletion of the natural resources made available to man (MINEPDED,<sup>(1)</sup> 2010).

In the absence of an appropriate environmental management plan, the anthropogenic agro-industrial and carbon dioxide emissions have contributed to the degradation of the coastal environment, and to the destruction and depletion of natural resources (Fongnzossié, 2012). The degradation of the environment is amplified by the fact that the status of the marine environments and the available common resources are more complex to identify and manage than the case for the delimited terrestrial spaces where the owners are recognizable (Campredon & Cuq, 2001; Stoffle & Stoffle, 2007).

In these ecoregions, environmental and socio-economic behaviors of the populations are now scrutinized by the social and environmental sciences experts. Among the open fields of research are the causes of the migration of fishermen (Njifonjou et al., 1995; Sabinot, 2008), and the problems of communal management in general (Hardin, 1968; Ostrom, 1990), fisheries in particular (Gordon, 1954).

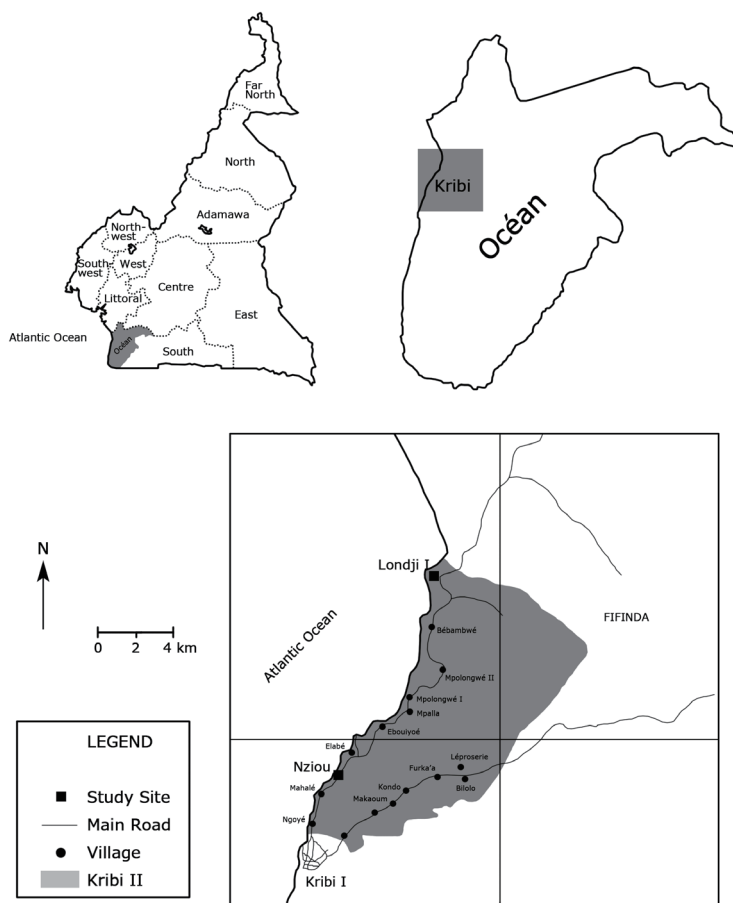
In Cameroon, artisanal fishing contributes to the promotion of food self-sufficiency in animal protein in general and in particular to the improvement of the social well-being of the population. This is mainly the case for the inhabitants of the Kribian maritime coast (Satia & Horemans, 1993). However, this activity suffers from daily disputes between employers and employees, accusations of destruction of fishing equipment, and the disappearance of fishing cargoes. Similarly, from the environmental point of view, overfishing of sea products, water pollution, construction on the beachfront, and illegal exploitation of sand are recorded. Faced with this situation, this paper examines the politico-administrative organization, access to resources, the regulatory context and management of cohabitation in multiple research sites.

Ethnographic data used in this article were collected on several field trips between 2010–2013, then updated during the first half of 2016.<sup>(2)</sup> Research techniques include literature review, direct observation, and semi-directed interviews of 40 interviewees equally distributed by gender (20 informants in each of the two villages, and 10 persons each of the same sex per group). Informants were selected based on the following criteria: permanent residence in the selected villages, membership in one of the target communities, proven participation in the local economic and/or livelihood activities. The anthropology of the new institutionalism (Ostrom, 1990) was used as the theoretical framework for data interpretation.

## HUMAN SETTLEMENT, POLITICAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY AREAS

### Research Location

The locality of Kribi, a tourist region in Cameroon, is blessed with abundant natural resources. It is at the center of many economic stakes and home to multiple livelihood activities, hence the settlement of populations of diverse origins. The present study was carried out in two coastal localities of Nziou and Londji I located in the Kribi II District of the Ocean Division of South Region of Cameroon (Fig. 1). The climate is Guinean type, with four seasons, namely, two periods of heavy rains (March–June and September–December) and two dry seasons (December–February and July–August). The minimum relative humidity is observed in March (70%) and the maximum in September (96%). The temperature varies between 23°C and 29.1°C. This climate is conducive to two cycles of annual food crops, namely peanut, beans, and maize. Geographically, Nziou is located on the Kribi-Edéa highway about three kilometers from the center of



**Fig. 1.** Localization of Nziou and Londji I in Kribi II Subdivision (Cameroon)

Kribi. This locality is delimited by the villages of Elabé in the north, Zami in the south, Ngoye in the east and by the Atlantic Ocean in the west. The village of Londji I is located in the Kribi II District, 15 km from the center of the city of Oceania, on the Edéa-Kribi highway. Its neighboring villages are the Bibambwe II to the south, Bipaga to the north, and Londji II to the east. The Atlantic Ocean is to the west.

### Populations of Nziou and Londji I Villages

#### 1. Local populations (Batanga and Mabi/Mabéa)

According to the literature (Mveng, 1984; Ondoua, 1988; Emeno, 2005), the former Batanga populations calling themselves indigenous are the direct descendants of Mutanga Mbédi, the “creator” and father of the coastal people. Mbédi had five sons, including Duala-So, Isubu, Malimba, Ekolé, and Mutanga. They

all set out for locations on the coast of Cameroon after their departure from the East of the Nile in Egypt, encountering many difficulties, which resulted in wars and divisions. The sons of Mutanga Mbédi departed to the west, reaching the shores of the Atlantic Ocean towards the end of the 17th century. They settled gradually by the end of the 18th century, each subgroup choosing its location depending on the opportunities that were there. Some of the Bapuku of the great group Batanga became the inhabitants of the village Londji I.

The local populations of the Nziou village are the Mabi. It is known that after the Pygmies passed through the Kribi region (Dugast, 1949; Mveng, 1984), the Nziou village saw the arrival of the Mabi at the current site. These are part of the littoral tribes of the larger Bantu group, and contain a fairly large number of fishermen (Monod, 1928). The fishermen group hold the land inherited from their ancestors, a situation which is conducive to their great involvement in activities such as agriculture, hunting, and logging. Apart from the close ties between them and the sea, these populations have gradually adopted trade and fishing as complementary means of livelihood (Satia & Horemans, 1993).

Coastal resources in general, and fish in particular, are widely consumed as readily available and easily accessible food (Baba, 1985). In Nziou and Londji I, there is abundant fish, a highly valued basic and supplementary foodstuff. The sea is considered by local populations as a resource imbued with the power of protection and purification. It is a space for leisure and relaxation for the coastal populations, conducive to reducing the stresses of everyday life. As Emeno (2005: 56) pointed out: "The sea teaches the Batanga the dream, the poetry, the escape, the meditation and the deepening of the thought of life here and now, thought of the afterlife. The sea teaches the serenity and peace of the soul [...]" The sea is also a space of ritual practices, a body of knowledge, a virtuous entity, the provider of fish, as well as an inspiration for the sense of reason and responsibility for those who cohabit and co-utilize local resources. It is also a place of rites dedicated to the ancestors in order to ensure the availability of resources.

## 2. Foreign communities: Nigerian and Beninese

The settlement of migrant populations on the sea coast of Cameroon dates from the second half of the 20th century. Nigerian migrants have settled on the Cameroon coast since the early 1930s (Satia & Horemans, 1993). Their massive arrival in the village of Londji I dates back to the 1970s according to Njoh Adolphe.<sup>(3)</sup> Beninese migrants are settled in the locality of Nziou. According to matching testimonies of the local populations, their settlement on the coast of Cameroon dates back to the early 1970s, with a massive arrival peak between 1990 and 1995. The Beninese are experienced in purse seine pelagic fishing and slide bait fishing, methods of fishing that they introduced to Cameroon (Satia & Horemans, 1993). Since then, there have been many ties between these migrants with the Cameroonian population of Nziou.

In general, the large influx of West African nationals into the fisheries of Londji and Nziou villages has led to major changes in the system of exploitation of coastal resources, especially with the motorization of boats, and other new mobility equipment, and new fishing practices. These have facilitated access to the fish-

eries resources and, consequently, increased fishermen income, but also over-exploitation of the same resources as a result of intensive fishing (Njifonjou et al., 1995; Bitha, 2010) by a large fishing population. Indeed, a socio-economic study carried out on the coast of Cameroon (Njifonjou et al., 1995), counted about 24,136 fishermen, 6,847 fishing patrons, and 17,289 fishermen's assistants, the majority of whom were of West African descent. More specifically, 77.9% were Nigerian nationals, compared with 17.2%, 2.6%, and 2.2%, respectively from Cameroon, Ghana, and Benin. This statistical data remains reliable to date in light of the observations made by the author, and because the traditional activities of choice for West African migrants continue to be in the exploitation of fishery resources, including fishing and making smoked fish, construction, trading and maintenance of canoes, and selling engines and fishing nets.

Coastal resources serve various functions daily in the communities that exploit them. Poopó citizens from Benin says that beyond its exquisite flavor and taste, the fish commonly known as tetradon (*Tetraodon biocellatus*) is full of medicinal virtues. Indeed, the powder obtained from its dried skin mixed with red oil is, according to them, a remedy for cough and sore throat. Salted fish are usually recommended for hypertensive people.<sup>(4)</sup> In this perspective, Sabinot (2008: 94) pointed out that the globefish (*Ephippion guttiferum*) had medical functions for the Poopó of Nyanga in Gabon. For example, for the relief of pain due to Angina or obstruction of the esophagus or trachea, the dried skin of globefish is burned, pounded and mixed with a little palm oil and ingested.

### 3. Spatial occupation of the territory by Beninese and Nigerians communities

The Beninese and Nigerian communities live separately in the research area. The village Nziou is inhabited by Beninese nationals, and Londji I by Nigerians. In Nziou, Beninese coexist with the indigenous Mabi populations, while in Londji I, Nigerians live together with the Batanga. Both Beninese and Nigerians consider themselves to be the true bearers of fishing knowledge, regarding the local populations as mere fishing guides.

### 4. Interactions between Beninese and Nigerians communities

There is no apparent social interaction between these two foreign communities. Indeed, the author did not observe during fieldwork any case of social meeting, mixed marriages and other tangible forms of collaboration between the two foreign communities. On the other hand, each community collaborated individually with the local populations. However, in case of emergency, such as distress at sea, mutual assistance is required regardless of nationality or community of origin. This type of behavior is part of the logic of natural solidarity between all the operators of this marine area.

### 5. Political-administrative organizations in Nziou and Londji I

The social organization is structured around a clan system. Nziou Village has six clans namely the Bikoua, the Bindayili, the Biamankiu, the Bipah, the Bigondo, and the Sassanguié, with a clan leader at their head. The clan leader is elected

by consensus from the members of the different clans. In decision-making, the large indigenous families have agreed to entrust the administrative management of the village to the Sassanguié, although a possible rotation is not excluded. In order to ensure transparent management of public/community affairs, each clan is represented in the council of notables by two or three people. The designation of these representatives is based on a certain number of criteria such as team spirit, listening skills, and participation in the execution of common interest projects. In the decision-making process concerning the life of the village, some representatives of the Cameroonian and Beninese communities can be solicited. Depending on seniority and involvement in the daily activities of the community, non-natives can become notables.<sup>(5)</sup>

Londji I Village has three main clans. These are the Bobenda, located at the Northern entrance of the village, the Bomagiya, who live on the beachfront, and the Bossena, living in between these two blocks. Politico-administrative power is managed by a 3rd-degree Chief belonging to the Bobenda clan. Upon the death of the incumbent, the successor to the throne must be chosen by consensus by the delegates representing the different clans. The new chief is assisted in the performance of his duties by notables from the 3 great families. The Nigerian community is headed by a community leader who is the chief of the clan and serves as a conduit of communication between the nationals and the local authorities.

## ECONOMIC SOLIDARITIES AND COMPLEMENTARITIES BETWEEN THE COMMUNITIES

In the Nziou and Londji I villages, community members are daily involved in the complementary economic activities of fishing, making smoked fish, agriculture, and trade. In practice, various occupations are places for the manifestation of both intra and inter-community solidarities and conflicts between the indigenous and non-indigenous actors (Socpa, 2010).

### Economic Solidarity between the Actors and the Social Division of Labor

Within the communities of Nziou and Londji I, the diversity of know-how and livelihood activities provide promote the exchange of goods and services. For example, the Nigerian and Beninese nationals supply the local Cameroonians with fishing nets, outboard engines, and motorized canoes. The ingenuity of these actors ranges from assembly to marketing and continuous monitoring, or troubleshooting, as confirmed by one Batanga: "If we want motorized canoes, we buy them from Nigerians. They have more knowledge in this area than we do. There is a Nigerian who supplies our locality. Every time there is a trouble with our canoes, we call on him."<sup>(6)</sup> There is trust between the local Nigerians and the indigenous people based on the principle of gift and counter-gift. Because of their great involvement in fishing, Nigerian fishermen also provide fresh fish to the Cameroonian fish smokers, and in return, the local populations supply the West African

nationals with agricultural, and gathered faunal and floristic products.<sup>(7)</sup> In addition, Cameroonian women own and provide cold rooms for fishermen of all nationalities to preserve seafood. They also provide fishermen with the blocks of ice necessary for chilling the catch at sea, in exchange for essential manufactured products such as soap, rice, and oil (Tiotso et al., 2014).

This interdependent relationship between the local populations with a natural control over the land, flora, and fauna on the one hand, and the Nigerians and Beninese migrants with easy access to the fishery resources thanks to their ingenuity and their interesting financial capacities, creates a kind of economic solidarity between the actors of these communities. Supported by a system of social division of labor, this economic solidarity is also expressed through the distribution of positions of responsibility within the fishing teams and in the workshops for the manufacture and maintenance of canoes. In the process of exploitation of fisheries resources, for example, work is well organized among several people with specific and complementary responsibilities. Moreover, managers or owners of the fishing gear, the master or principal fisherman, the assistant fisherman, and the shipper, all of whom are recruited without distinction of their community of origin. It often happens that an owner of fishing equipment, whether Beninese, Cameroonian or Nigerian, solicits the services of able young men whose remuneration depends on the quantity of the catch obtained. Ultimately, members of these different communities belong to the same communal mutual assistance associations in Nziou and Londji I. Membership in community associations gives support to members in case of social and economic difficulties (loans for the purchase of school supplies, fishing equipment or the launch of an income-generating activity). Similarly, when a West African citizen dies and his community does not have the resources to repatriate the body, local communities give them space for burial.

#### Complementarity and Cohabitation between the Cameroonian and West African Communities

Migration generates coexistence and exchange of experiences among different groups involved in the exploitation of natural resources in the coastal region of Kribi. In discussing the question of the benefits and drivers of the dynamics of know-how in the fishing and fish-smoking sector, for example, it appears that most innovations are brought about from the know-how of Beninese and Nigerian migrants. In the study villages, it is very common to hear people say, "When the Nigerians...Beninese arrived," "the smoking methods of the Beninese," or such and such "is an introduction of the Nigerians," or that, "They were the first to ...," and "they are experts at ...." Moreover, as a result of the arrival of Nigerian nationals, motorized canoes and the related know-how gradually entered the fishing practices and the means of water transport in the waters for the populations of the Londji I village (Brochet & Hohpe, 2007). Similar developments were acknowledged at Nziou since the settlement of Beninese migrants. In spite of occasional misunderstandings that arise in the co-management of the natural resources of these localities, the substantially peaceful coexistence between the



different communities has facilitated the rapid dissemination of working methods which in turn have “impacted” on knowledge used in the exploitation of coastal resources.<sup>(8)</sup> This is understandable, since “as a rule, the proximity of cultures of any degree plays a positive role that greatly facilitates acculturation” (Abou, 1981: 53). The influence on the dynamics of practices and the culture of tolerance of the populations is not negligible.

In reality, the migrants contribute, through their working methods, to the resolution of certain existential constraints in their adopted areas (Neisheim et al., 2006); especially the readjustment of cultural practices as seen in Nziou and Londji I regarding the deployment methods for fishery. This is proof of the degree of openness and collaboration between the cultures in contact. For Guglielmino et al. (1995: 75–89), “the mechanisms of cultural transmission, with their different degrees of conservatism, determine the stability of cultural traits.” In addition to their impact on the functioning of fishing units, these actors have a significant influence on the spread of technology and know-how in a variety of fields (Chaboud & Charledso, 1991). In this regard, many local actors clearly recognize the contribution of West African nationals in the field of assembly and maintenance of motorized canoes<sup>(9)</sup> as well as in the implementation of certain techniques of fishing and fish conservation.

## ACCESS TO RESOURCES, REGULATORY CONTEXTS AND CONFLICTS

Land and Fishery Resources are Among the Assets Available and More or Less Subject to Co-Management.

### Land resources

In Kribi, the resources subject to co-management that are likely to create tensions, are land for cultivation or construction, or reserved for wildlife and flora. Each indigenous family owns and exploits pieces of land bequeathed to them generations ago by their ancestors. Although they have a traditional imprint, the rights of local populations are governed by the laws of the republic. Article 8 (1) of Law No. 94/01 of 20 January 1994 on forestry, wildlife, and fisheries stipulates that customary rights are those enjoyed by local populations to exploit all forest, wildlife, and fisheries products. However, for security reasons, obtaining land titles remains the only lasting means to secure the status of the landowner. As far as foreigners<sup>(10)</sup> are concerned, they can rent or buy parcels of land<sup>(11)</sup> for a sum of money or receive as a gift from their host family, to build provisional or permanent shelter, depending on the arrangements between the different parties.

Also, inter-ethnic and inter-community marriages also offer additional opportunities for access to available land. As an illustration, if an indigenous Batanga or Mabi Cameroonian girl marries a Beninese or Nigerian national, the husband will engage in fishing and/or fishing related activities, as do many from these West African communities. Conversely, a Beninese and/or Nigerian woman who has

married into an indigenous family has the opportunity to dispose of a plot of land owned by her inherited family to engage without constraint in some rural work or harvest wood. Such complementarity contributes greatly to the smoothness of the ties between the persons united by the matrimonial alliance.

#### Other coastal resources

The use of wood as a source of energy has increased significantly on Cameroon's coastline, leading to deforestation. In Cameroon, the first texts on environmental legislation date back to the 1980s, notably the law of 29 December 1989 on toxic waste, which was the first with regards to managing the environment. Another sectoral law was then added to the regulatory arsenal, Law No. 94/01 of 20 January 1994 on the forest, wildlife, and fisheries regime and its subsequent decrees from 1996 onwards. Far-reaching environmental legislations emerged with the 1996 Constitution, guaranteeing, in its preamble, the right of all citizens to a healthy environment, followed by the framework law No. 96/12 of 5 August 1996 on the environment as a legislative translation of this constitutional provision, which governs the management of the environment in Cameroon. In Title III, Section III on Coastal and Marine Waters Protection, the principles governing environmental regulations in Cameroon is stipulated, as to the precaution, preventive, and corrective action, payment for induced pollution, liability, participation, and subsidiarity.

These various measures have been followed by numerous texts governing the forestry and environmental sector (Fongzossié et al., 2014). At the local level, the authorities are working hard for a sustainable exploitation of some coastal land resources. For this reason, the local authorities<sup>(12)</sup> regularly prohibit the uncontrolled exploitation of sand and mangrove wood along the Kribian beaches by various communities. These administrative acts are made public through press releases, awareness campaigns, and enforcement measures for offenders.

#### Halieutic resources

Fishing is an important food and a vital socio-economic sector for the Cameroonian people. Indeed, fishery products account for about 25.5% of the protein intake in the national diet. The average consumption of fish per head per year is 17.9 kg compared with 13.07 kg per capita for meat (Ngok et al., 2005; Belal & Baba, 2006). This rate rose to 18.1 kg in 2011 (FAO, 2015). According to the same report, the total catch of fish in Cameroon was estimated at 153,500 t, i.e., 75,000 t from inland waters and 78,500 t from the sea in 2013. The fishing sector contributed 2.7% to Cameroon's gross domestic product in 2014 (INS,<sup>(13)</sup> 2015). On the Cameroon coast, catching of fish is permitted to all camp residents only if they comply with the requirements of state legislation and local standards.<sup>(14)</sup> Among these conditions are outside personal identification documents, including the fishing license and the certificate of seaworthiness, and to abide unconditionally by laws and regulations on the exploitation of fisheries resources. It should be noted that in Cameroon, the management of fishing activity falls

under the jurisdiction of the State through Law No. 94/01 of 20 January 1994 on forestry, wildlife and fisheries. According to Article 8, Paragraph 1, the rights of use or customary rights are within the meaning of this law, where the right is granted to the local populations to exploit all forest, wildlife, and fishery products. In this wake, several decrees have been established. These include Decree No. 95/413 / PM of 20 June 1995, laying down certain detailed rules for the application of the fishing system, Order No. 0026 / MINEPIA / DIRPEC / SCPIA / SPA<sup>(15)</sup> of 11 April 2000 on the prohibition of certain fishing gears,<sup>(16)</sup> and Order No. 0002 / MINEPIA of 01 August 2001 laying down detailed rules for the protection of fishery resources.

Many actors in the artisanal fisheries have a superficial knowledge of these regulations or are driven by bad faith in the application, according to this informant: "All that we know about the law is that it is forbidden to cut the *matanda*,<sup>(17)</sup> that we must not go too far at sea, that we must not fish small fish, that we should not dig too much sand on the beach. But everybody does not always respect that."<sup>(18)</sup> However, there are a few positive points that need to be mentioned. Motorized canoes for deep-sea fishing are registered, and the Beninese, Cameroonian, and Nigerian owners are making efforts to ensure the legality of their operations at sea by, inter alia, recruiting qualified personnel and annually renewing the Certificate of seaworthiness. However, in times of deficiency, some operators do not hesitate to use prohibited gear to ensure good catches. This situation is dependent not only on the weakness of the legislation in this area but also on the nature of the resources in operation. It should be noted that, despite the access modalities set up, fish resources are commonly referred to as common resources (Vermard, 2009). This is due to the difficulty in regulation and the fact that selfish grabbing by an individual or a small group inadvertently results in a loss of profit for the others. The difficulties in managing the fisheries have been extensively studied in the literature on communal management (Gordon, 1954; Hardin, 1968) and in particular on the tragedy of the commons (Ostrom, 1990).

Clearly, free access to the exploitation of coastal resources has the effect of reducing yields per unit of fishing, the progressive degradation of the coastal environment, and the overexploitation of most natural resources. From this perspective, the management of these resources will depend on the ability of managers to determine in advance the number and quality of operators and the exploitation possibilities of each. This is difficult to achieve because, in order to succeed in a competitive environment, as is the case in the Kribi coastal fisheries, the operators prioritize profit. This is why fishermen constantly multiply the number of net sections in their daily activities. This situation is not without its drawbacks, as the fishermen of Nziou and Londji I report the scarcity of fish. To make up for this shortage, these fishermen are obliged to travel long distances at sea and to make long stays in the hope of a large catch. One informant testified: "Before, we did not need to spend days and nights at sea to have fish. There were plenty of them everywhere. Now, as fish have become scarce, people are sometimes forced to spend two, three or even four days at sea to earn his living."<sup>(19)</sup>

The reasons for the smaller catch may include the increasing pressure from the various groups of Beninese, Nigerians, and local fishermen who exploit the halieutic resources. But if exploitation by trawlers is stipulated to operate beyond the 2,000 nautical zone for example, and it is common to see illegal trawl fishing on the coastline. This illegal competition reinforces the difficulties for the artisanal fishermen. These commercial trawler companies are hardly identifiable because they operate in the night. They contribute to the overexploitation and destruction of artisanal<sup>(20)</sup> fishermen's fishing gear. Moreover, they are responsible for water pollution due to the huge quantity of dead and young fish they release in the sea to evade the control teams surveilling illegal activities.

This situation is more than critical in a context marked by a remarkable absence of local initiatives for the sustainability of fisheries resources, e.g., only one fishing pond identified in the study area.

## GOVERNANCE BODIES AND ACTORS IN NZIOU AND LONDJI I VILLAGES

The participation of the various communities to be involved in the management of resources is governed by several scales of jurisdiction. In the Nzio and Londji I villages, there are a number of factors that lead to conflicts in the communities: demographic pressure, small-scale urbanization, unemployment, and loss of natural resources. Demographic growth is at the origin of the strong pressure on the land and is manifested by the double sales of pieces of land and oppositions against the registration procedures. There is uncontrolled occupation of land and constructions on the beachfront, and acts of pollution. Unemployment, on the other hand, encourages young people to engage in illegal activities such as the creation of sand quarries in prohibited areas or uncontrolled exploitation of timber. All of the above lead to social tensions, degradation of coastal environment including the mangrove. From time to time, this situation requires the intervention of the administrative and judicial authorities to restore peace and order.

### Traditional Instances

In the event of a dispute, the Beninese, Cameroonian and Nigerian populations can expose the matter to the following authorities in hierarchical order: first, the community and clan leaders for problems within one community of affiliation, then to the heads of blocks who are in charge of a specific area of the village. Upstream and depending on the circumstances, block heads will work in synergy with the chiefs of communities and of clans in order to dispel any misunderstandings, and if need be, channel to their hierarchy any information on situations that deserve special treatment. Subsequently, the arbitration of the village chief who intervenes as a last resort can be solicited, if one party expresses the need. In any event, disputes regularly brought before the traditional authorities first are likely to be situations of land fraud, financial fraud, and the disputes between employers and employees on the management of fishing cargoes,<sup>(21)</sup>

**Table 1.** Levels of local governance and statutory powers in the research area of Nziou and Londji

Levels of local governance	Actors	Statutory powers
1	Community Leader	Elected by community members, performs the following functions: updating the list of his fellow citizens with arrivals and departures; collaboration with authorities, sensitization of its non-citizens on the laws of the host country Cameroon.
2	Head of Clan	Ensures respect for cultural values, coordination of activities, and conflict resolution within the clan.
3	Head of Block	Responsible for a particular block in the village. Competent in the resolution of problems between residents of different communities under its jurisdiction.
4	Village Head	Chairs the council of notables overseeing ritual ceremonies and dispute settlement. Reports weekly to the Sous-Préfet, the security situation in his village.
5	Sub-Divisional Officer	Ensures the security of people and properties through the coordination of all the relevant services of the State.
6	Other Officers	Includes security services (gendarmerie, police and merchant navy), fisheries managers, estates and land affairs, flora, and fauna. Each of these services may at any time decide on a case falling within its area of competence.
7	Court Prosecutor's Office	Supreme authority in the resolution of disputes of all kinds not solved locally.

destruction and theft of the agricultural products, and other forms of aggression. In this context, local authorities closer to those involved use their influence to resolve disputes. The distinctive mark of these traditional jurisdictions is the fact that they always advocate amicable resolution and reconciliation between the opponents for a peaceful cohabitation. Ultimately, when crisis situation requiring exceptional security measures occurs, the chiefs of the various villages concerned will consult with their superiors to call on police or gendarmerie services.

### State Instances

There are law enforcement agencies, the ministerial divisions involved in the management of coastal resources and the courts. The Ministry of Transport through the Merchant Marine Directorate controls all navigation operations and oversees the registration of fishing vessels and boats. The Ministry of Defense (MINDEF) is responsible for the surveillance of territorial waters. The Ministry of Lands, Flora, and Fauna has been mentioned above. These different bodies have the right to intercept the perpetrators of the violations and bring them to justice. Whatever the nature of the problem, every resident of each village who wishes to involve State authorities is obliged to go to downtown Kribi, where the police, the gendarmerie and the public prosecutor are located. At this stage, apart from the prolongation of the resolution of the conflicts introduced with the traditional authorities, the violent disputes must all be halted.

In terms of collaboration, moreover, traditional and legal bodies perform com-

plementary functions in several respects. Thus, the identification of fugitives, witnesses, intelligence and surveillance of suspicious persons' movements requires the support of traditional authorities closer to the population. Socio-economic conflicts between communities require the presence and cooperation of traditional authorities for their management. On the other hand, for the coordination and harmonious management of people and goods, heads of the various villages of Kribi meet regularly on Mondays around the sub-divisional officer to discuss the problems and challenges facing local communities of Londji I and Nzou villages as well as Beninese and Nigerian fishermen.

## RESOURCES EXPLOITATION AND LOCAL DEVELOPMENT ISSUES

During the research, opportunities for local development were observed, despite some natural and logistical constraints. Promising opportunities such as the mutually complementary economic solidarity links between the different communities must be capitalized. Local populations were seen supplying the Benin and Nigerian nationals with food crops (maize, peanuts, beans, etc.) and wildlife products, while the non-Cameroonians provided the local people with fishery techniques, fish for making smoked fish, and other forms of assistance. This provides a framework for the exchange of knowledge and practices.

For example, a canoe manufacturer of Beninese origin said during the survey: "We are working here with some Cameroonians and they are also learning how to make canoes." The interaction between the actors as shown above, backed by mechanisms for the exchange of services and knowledge, has promoted the progressive "modernization" of fishing gear and preservation of fishery products as well as the increase in catch per outing at sea. More so, this interaction has reduced post-harvest losses through a functional cold-storage chain. In the domains of fishing, smoked fish, trade and agriculture, the interconnectedness of the actors contributes to the dynamization of economic activities at the local level and, by extension, in the surrounding communities.

On the economic dynamism at the local level, Mvetumbo (2013: 103) observed that the marketing system for fishery products underwent a major transformation in this locality over the last few decades. If, in the past, fisheries constituted purely the subsistence activity for the local population and were managed mainly by men, it has now become a lucrative activity, and, as a result, involves many people including native fishermen and, more interestingly, women who are fresh fish wholesalers, semi wholesalers, smokers and retailers, thanks to the strong involvement of West African nationals. This context also contributes to the financial empowerment of the women involved in the fishery business.

There is peace in the region, it should be noted, because contacts between the members of this cosmopolitan population are dexterously managed through a good political-administrative organization. If the indigenous people (Mabi/Mabéa, and the Batanga) are represented by clans headed by clan chiefs; the allochthons (especially the Beninese and Nigerians), have organizations headed by their respective community leaders. At the top of this social aggregate are the customary

chiefs of each village whose political, economic, and social functions are to ensure cohesion between the different communities. As regards economic activities, interdependent ties between communities constitute a key factor for peace and development. Community groupings between local and foreign actors consolidate human relations, and promote peace and development. As a result, clashes are settled by competent local authorities.

What strategies are available for sustainable management? Field research reveals that illegal logging of mangrove woods, inappropriate fishing nets and catching of small fish by the actors involved are practices that are similar to the strategy used by farmers to ensure quality of output and increase revenue. Such environmental depletive activities call for greater vigilance from the state structures in charge of regulating access to natural resources. This does not mean that nothing is being done so far to limit this damage, but that appropriate and effective measures should be taken. In this regard, the problem should be given the same attention as that of border security, the fight against maritime piracy, and the protection of all kinds of resources in their jurisdiction. This would be done, for example, by increasing the number of checkpoints such as landing stages, increasing the staff on water, silviculture, and merchant navy teams, as well as unannounced law enforcement operations to ensure sustainable management of these natural resources for the benefit of the populations. To this end, Law No. 94/01 of 20 January 1994 on the forest, wildlife, and fisheries regime in Cameroon, backed by several implementing decrees, constitutes the guideline for the safeguarding of national wealth, and must be applied without complacency.

## CONCLUSION

In the coastal villages of Nziou and Londji I in the Kribi area, Cameroonian, Beninese, and Nigerian communities participate in the exploitation of natural resources. Access to and management of natural resources and the modalities of coexistence are supported by a dual system of local administrative and traditional governance. Collaboration between Cameroonians and foreigners in the exploitation of natural resources promotes experience and expertise sharing, and hence, constitute a good example of common property management (Ostrom, 1990). This harmonious “living together” is an asset for local development in terms of modernizing the exploitation equipment and the economic development of the actors involved. Moreover, the increase in the number of operators entails increased pressure on resources and calls for better communication on the modalities of access to resources.

The coexistence of communities of different nationalities and the co-management of resources in the villages of Nziou and Londji I allow modernization of fishing gears, exchange of experience, overexploitation of resources, and the occasional emergence of conflicts. However, if disputes between the populations within the settlements and artisanal fishermen are resolved with some efficiency, clashes with illegal trawlers are often dismissed. The economic pressure and the difficulty in identifying and intercepting these anonymous trawlers seem to justify the



incomprehensible delays in the legal proceedings initiated by the small artisanal fishermen. Greater awareness on the part of the populations, indigenous or otherwise, concerning the exploitation of the coastal resources, and a greater involvement by the State in enforcing the law is essential for the sustainable management of the natural resources of this locality. In conclusion, additional multidisciplinary research would be appropriate to explore other types of threats to natural resources such as pollution, deforestation, climate change, and resource depletion.

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## NOTES

- (1) Ministère de l'Environnement de la Protection de la Nature et du Développement Durable (MINEPDED).
- (2) I am very grateful to Moise Mvetumbo, my research assistant who participated in the ethnographic data collection under my guidance.
- (3) Village elder and sub-chief of Londji, interviewed 17/12/2010.
- (4) This is contrary to the prescription in biomedicine.
- (5) For example, a native from Benin Poopó community is an acting member of the Nziou Village Council.
- (6) Narration from a Batanga fisherman in Londji (19/02/2016).
- (7) For example, timber required to assemble and maintain canoes and firewood used in smoking the fish.
- (8) For example, fishing techniques, fish preservation, and the assembly of efficient canoes as means of transport for people and goods.
- (9) These canoes carry heavier loads, transport a larger number of people, and travel longer distances at sea in order to reach the fishing ground faster and operate more efficiently.
- (10) The term, "foreigner" is used here to mean all persons who, although residents, have no territorial ties to the indigenous populations of Nziou and Londji I, including the Tou-pouri, Boulou, Bamiléké, Bassa-Cameroonians, Beninese, and Nigerians.
- (11) This plot of land is rented for a limited period of time.
- (12) The mayor and the South Prefect in partnership with the Ministry of Lands and Ministry of Flora and Fauna.
- (13) INS: Institut National de la Statistique
- (14) For example, the number of days dedicated to the cultural events where everybody is expected to go to sea, compulsory assistance in the event of maritime accident, and the protection of the property of others, which is why any person whose property is threatened or taken may file a complaint.
- (15) Ministère de l'Élevage, des Pêches et des Industries Animales (MINEPIA), Premier Ministre (PM), Direction des Pêches du Cameroun (DIRPEC), Secrétaire Particulier Permanent (SPA), Service Communal des Pêches et Industries Animales (SCPIA).
- (16) The fishing gears prohibited throughout Cameroon's territory include: beach seines,



- sparrow netting, baskets, gillnets with a mesh size less than 40 mm, line of unbaited hooks, and dams in streambeds.
- (17) “*Matanda*” is the local name of *Avicennia germinans* from the family of Avicenniaceae.
  - (18) Excerpt from an interview with one Mabi informant in Nziou (20/02/2016).
  - (19) Batanga fisherman, Londji (19/03/2016).
  - (20) Unfortunately, artisanal fishermen cannot initiate any legal proceedings when it is difficult to identify and intercept these trawlers. Only the merchant navy has the coercive means to intercept and take the violators to court.
  - (21) Some employers routinely accuse their employees of orchestrated illegal sale of fish at the docks. Indeed, often a malicious fisherman sells much of the catch before returning to the base at Londji or Nziou.

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